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## Montville harnesses sun for power

6/23/10 10:56 PM

By **MidcoastBeacon**

By Abigail Curtis  
For the midcoast BEACON

MONTVILLE — In Montville, the rays of the sun soon will be turned into electricity to power all municipal buildings, and that thought makes Administrative Assistant Susan Shell light up in a big smile.

“We’re very excited,” she said recently. “We thought, why not try to get our town further away from dependence on foreign oil and fossil fuels?”

That thought led to the drafting of a grant proposal to request a grant for some American Recovery and Reinvestment Act funds designed to help municipalities complete renewable energy projects.

The grant was accepted, which meant that the western Waldo County town would receive 90 percent of the money needed to install 42 solar panels on the roof of the Montville Sand Shed and to make two other town buildings much more weathertight. The \$44,733 grant has meant a lot to Montville, which has long been known as a progressive community, Shell said.

“It’s been a great process, and it didn’t just come out of the blue,” she said, adding that the town had made efforts to reduce electrical usage in its municipal buildings by nearly 27 percent beginning three years ago.

“It has a lot of support,” Shell said of the conservation and energy reduction efforts. “It will reduce the cost to the town for the utilities in the long run. We expect to save money pretty quickly.”

Jennifer Albee’s official title is the “Go-To Girl” at ReVision Energy’s Liberty Branch Office, which is installing the panels. The alternate energy company was co-founded by Bill Behrens, who also co-founded the Green Store in Belfast, and it has done many solar projects in Maine and New Hampshire.

Albee stood on the ground below the Montville solar panels, which are being installed high up on the sand shed’s roof, and explained some of the details of the system.

The panels, which were made in Massachusetts, will generate 190 watts of power each — a total of eight kilowatts altogether. That much wattage will produce about 10,800 kilowatt-hours of energy annually, approximately 1½ times as much as the typical American household uses in a year.

“Essentially, the sun hits the panels and turns it into electricity,” she said. “The power goes to the building and excess power goes back to the grid.” Montville will get a credit for the excess power not used by the sand shed and that will be applied to other town buildings.

The town’s total electricity use from September 2008 to August 2009 was 11,679 kilowatt-hours, according to Shell. That means that nearly every time the lights are flicked on in the town office, the power will be generated from the rooftop solar panels.

“The fun thing about projects like this is that people get so excited,” Albee said. “They see how it works. It’s an actual, live project. It’s public. It’s open.

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And that's exciting."

She refuted the often-held belief that the sun doesn't shine enough in Maine to make solar installations worthwhile.

"We get much more sun than Germany, which is the world leader in solar installations," she said.

One of the company's recent projects was to place 48 large solar panels on the roof of the Troy Howard Middle School in Belfast, after officials successfully applied for their own grant funding.

When the school was originally built, the architect marked on roof as the "solar roof."

"It's great to see that come full circle," Albee said.

ReVision Energy plans to do an educational presentation about the solar installation on the Montville Sand Shed sometime in July, about a month after the panels will be turned on. For more information, call the town office at 342-5544.

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